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MORE INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH TAX REFUND SCHEME INDICTED

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGREGOR W. SCOTT announced that on November 13, 2003, VIRGINIA RAMOS, 47, of San Lorenzo, her sister ORALIA BARAJAS de TORRES, 50, of Modesto, and BARAJAS de TORRES' son, JOSE BARAJAS TORRES, 27, of Waterford, were indicted by a federal grand jury in Fresno on conspiracy to defraud the United States and making false claims to the Internal Revenue Service, by submitting false tax returns.

In a separate indictment, JAIME SIERRA TORRES, 32, of Strathmore, was also indicted by the federal grand jury in Fresno on conspiring with others to defraud the United States and making false claims to the Internal Revenue Service, by submitting false tax returns. Both cases are part of the government's ongoing crackdown on alleged illegal tax refund schemes operating in the Central Valley.

According to the indictments, the defendants were part of a group of numerous individuals who executed tax refund schemes using false Forms W-2 that listed employers who did not employ the alleged wage earner, and set forth wages and withholdings that would make the taxpayer eligible for a tax refund. The defendants filed the tax returns by mail and used their residence addresses and post office boxes to receive the fraudulent refund checks. Once the tax refund checks arrived at various post office boxes and residences, the signature of the alleged payee or the signature of the defendant was affixed to the back of each check as an endorsement. Defendants would then allegedly cash the checks at various check cashing locations in the Central Valley.

The defendants each face up to 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 each if convicted.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sheila K. Oberto. Both cases were investigated by the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service.

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